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Middlebury Bread Loaf
School *of* English

2025 Bread Loaf Journal

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Opening remarks:

Dear reader,

Here, we have seen ghosts. We have looked into water, we've called ourselves flowers, we've categorized our homes. We've swing danced, held our bodies in our palms and known our teeth.

I've been spending a lot of time this summer on the mountain thinking about the deer flies, which have seemed particularly present. It appears they're made of metal, buzz of copper, warm, coiled, vibrating and steely; unkillable, undeterred.

I like to think these writers and artists in the journal are a little like deer flies. They, too, are warm, vibrant, and undeterred. Hopefully not all bloodsuckers and biters, BLSE students have, as is human nature, been swatted and will doggedly return to what's important. Creating and sharing their art, making beauty out of bones and steadfastly continuing to create even when the world brushes us aside.

This is not a perfect analogy. I cannot fly, for example, and to my knowledge, nor can most of the people featured in this journal. But while waking up each day to fresh worldly worries and wondering what we can do to matter, I think these people have part of it figured out. Just share something with someone, because a collection matters. Linked voices matter. This journal is a chorus of buzzing—thankfully far less irritating than the real deer flies—and these artists aren't going anywhere.

Thank you to each contributor for sharing your work with us and allowing it to be celebrated. Thank you, reader, for picking this up and taking a look. It's good to matter.

Cleo Aukland, *coeditor*

Primary

KEELY HENDRICKS | OXFORD

I was born yellow as a dandelion stain.
You blamed it on the hat,
which was bright like the sun it shielded me from
as we left the hospital, you and I,
with separate air and blood supply.

Your world colored primary overnight:
my jaundiced cheeks, your lochia rubra,
father's green shins
and my blue, blue eyes,
which belonged to no one in our family
save the dead.

Another memory you handed down:
That painting I used to look at,
entranced, nights you held or fed me.
Red paint thick as cream,
and a lone indigo horseman
on a vermillion plain, riding, riding,
into more of the same.

What were you looking at, all that time,
past my shoulders rounded with a sleep:
The horseshoe on the nail
Or the hatchet in the frame?
Both, you recall, greased and black as the stillborn calf
its mother had licked clean.

Still

ANGELA JONES | VERMONT

When it happened Ella was taking an overnight train home for the funeral. It was the Lake Shore Limited from New York to Toledo. The train didn't go all the way to Detroit anymore. Not since the last one pulled out of Central Station in 1988. She was eight years old then, and leaving the city never crossed her mind. There was no other world outside of the six blocks surrounding the red brick two-family flat on Carmel Street. Her cousins lived upstairs. Her grandmother was four blocks away on Danbury and Exeter. And she could walk to the corner store by herself to buy Wonder Bread and Now & Laters. Even the Michigan State Fairgrounds was just up Woodward Ave. "Practically next door!" Her mother crowed proudly, so that Ella remembers summertime as one long carnival. Fingers sticky from elephant ears and frozen pop. Although her sister claims they only ever went once. The next year they moved to Wilfred Street. And the year after that they lived on Stoepel. But when she was eight, the year that the last train left Detroit, she was living an insular paradise, blowing the seeds off of dandelion clocks and picking purple mulberries off of low branches.

At five a.m. Ella shuffled into the one-room station in Toledo with the other passengers to catch the bus that would take them to Detroit. She dropped her bag at her feet and bounced on her heels, waiting. The bus always took its sweet time. Things slowed down the closer she got to home. And she struggled to slow with it, forcing her body to acclimate itself. Her world was a bit wider than six blocks now. When she left Detroit the first time, she developed a taste for it and never stopped leaving. "Well, I guess you get that honest," her father said. He had moved into the veterans' retirement home in Monterey and she went to visit him. "Darlin', you just can't sit still." He shook his head, smiling. "Look who's talking," she teased. Although deep down both were sobered by this bond. He had been leaving Detroit since before she was born. He snuck into the army at sixteen, weighing seven pounds less than the minimum allowed. He came back for a few years. Long enough to fall in foolish love, bounce Ella on his knee a couple of times, and throw a molotov cocktail through a loan shark's window. At least she never left a shitstorm in her wake, Ella thought smugly. Though she couldn't say for sure that that was true.

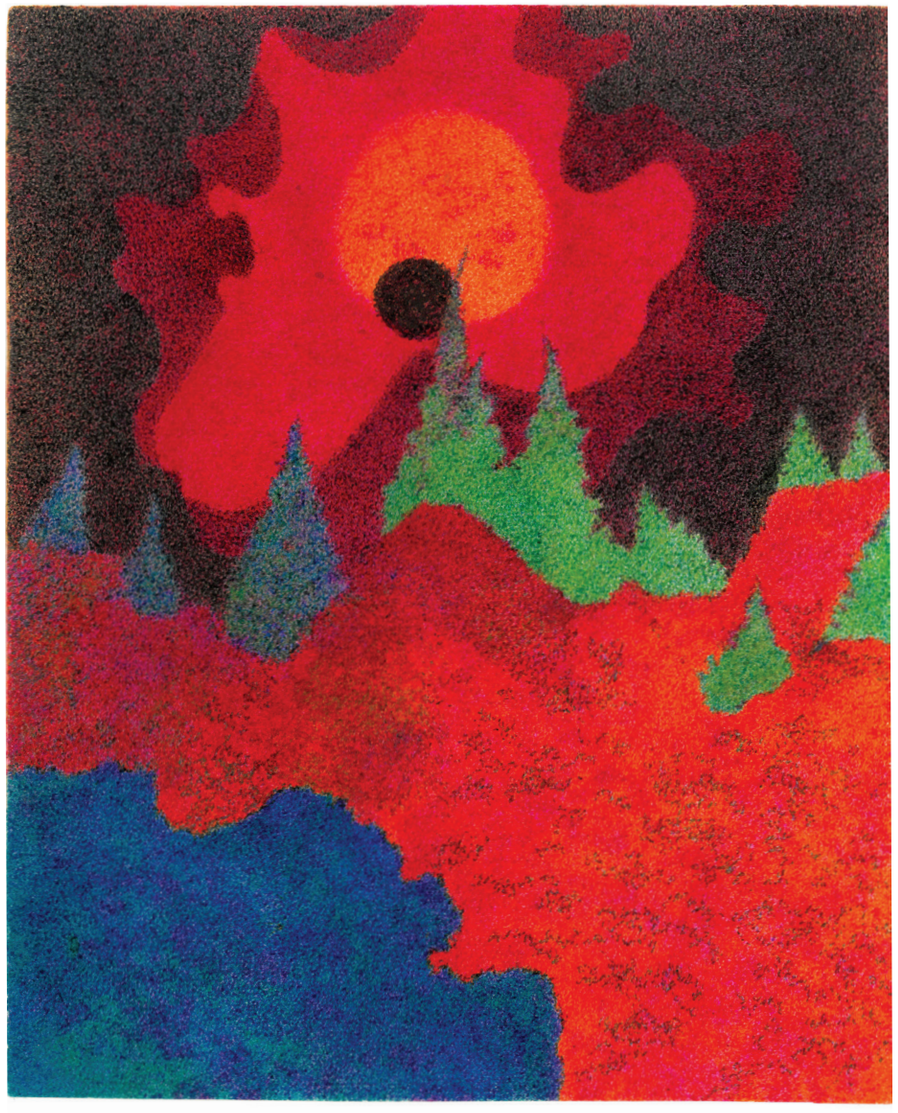
When the bus arrived, Ella sat in a window seat to get a good view of Detroit waking up; stretching, yawning. The Ambassador Bridge rising from the fog of the river. The bus usually drove them straight to the station on West Baltimore Street, without stopping. But this time it stopped. And Ella could see the white jeeps outside her window. The bus pulled over to the side of the road. The doors opened and a man in uniform stepped on. Young, clean-shaven and straight-backed. She had often seen officers stand that way. Stiff and poised to spring. Like the territorial farm dogs in the mountains of Huaraz. How do they expect anyone not to run from something poised to spring? She looked around to see if someone would gift her with a shared look of concern. There was an old man in a light blue sweater, sitting across the aisle from her. She tried to make eye contact, but he was staring straight ahead, almost as stiff as the officers. Up close he looked to be her father's age. Or the age her father would be. A week ago, an aunt whom Ella had never met made arrangements for his body to be brought back home to Detroit, "Where he belongs," she said to Ella over the phone.

The young officer seemed to shout at them, "This is US Customs and Border Patrol! We'll be coming down the row! Please be ready with a form of picture ID!" He stood there as another came on. They went down the aisle, holding their hands out. "Name," they said, glancing up and down, from ID to face, and back again. "Place of birth," they said, as if it weren't a question at all but a lazy observation. "Where are you coming from? Where are you going?" On and on they went, down the aisle, as Ella's shoulders shook and her chest tightened and her hands and her feet got cold. They stood in front of the old man in the light blue sweater. "ID." The old man stared straight ahead. "Sir, ID please." Louder this time. The old man was still. "Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to stand up." The old man didn't move, so the officer reached out to grab his arm. Ella stood. "Wait." she said.

She had the feeling of being outside of her body. "Ma'am, you need to sit down. Now!" Ella couldn't hear what the officers were shouting but she could see their lips moving. "Wait." she kept saying, "Wait." She wasn't sure what she wanted them to wait for. She just needed time. Time to figure out a way to keep this man from leaving. She was sure that he had people in Detroit who needed him. "Wait! Wait!" she shouted, as she was dragged off forcefully by the officers. She was pushed onto the ground with a knee in her back. She breathed in dust from the road and began choking. She raised her head as far up as she could, opened her eyes, and saw the old man. He was being led off the bus calmly and helped into the back of a patrol car. Before disappearing, he caught her eye and shook his head. "Be still," the look seemed to tell her. "Please be still."

Boreal Uncanny

JOSH LACLAIR | VERMONT



12/1/2024–6/8/2025

OWEN DUFFY | VERMONT

to pine a time i slivered the daylight into shallows
and i caught
  shadows in escapes
and caught erratics before they fell

before they fell, and crushed my face
into bloom; — i thought of making a home;

paranoia: to drown a home.

return: slip from, affliction to affection
or unshim the gap beneath the doors where
  our nearness hungers, for trucks of vacuum
packaged cherry-petal wine.

i wore a slip and skipped downroad
and i wore chickenwire tights

and crushed my face to bloom.

in passing caught daylight escaping;

  thought
  of making
* home.

in time i shivered caught and caught

'til loose snare so loose a loosened line
a fluid pine i began. shadowed the erratic

and ran for many miles.

i haptic bloom where a petal fell
fly by my chant affliction:

always to be where a petal fell

so slips the escapes.

naked by daylight, thought
to drown; making a home; *sustain*;.

pack a vacuum with paranoia
rolling hungers with affection.

caught beneath the gap
i wore a truck and felt
every crevice and

every creak
of a downroad

layers of shifting
spackle fibrous
tape decay-
ing de-
sustain: — — —

paranoia: to drown to make a home.

sustain: ,,,,,,,,,,,,,,

and lost affection and loose affliction and

she shutters to shades and opens

and Waits

♥ ♥ ♥

23 ridge rd

VICTORIA PEREZ | VERMONT

my mother's daily ritual
flipping 365
motivational pages

couch cushions deflated
sun-warmed snores
cuddled by calico purrs

clicking through ABC Family
Nick@Nite laugh tracks
summer DCOMs

alarm clock radio screeching
cutting across neighbors' backyards
hot pink late slips

dining room table never set
microwave-steamed broccoli
slightly burnt noodles, self-cooked

artificial ocean breeze, forest Glade
plug-ins concealing cat litter
light up the hallway

bookcases cluttered
with dollar-store picture frames
sweaty smiles from track meets

peeling blue paint against
bricks hugged by vines
faded wallpaper, Crayola-signed

The Last Basketball Game I Didn't Know Would Be Our Last Ending with a Line from Dante

DANA LOTITO-JONES | VERMONT

The dip in the driveway—
made soft from tires and
madness—did not get in our way
this time. Somehow that is all that went right.

Summer night slid to pummeled gray
like rotting watercolors drying.
Streetlights froze like gold teardrops that wouldn't
fall. The ball thumped the blues.

My brother was too tall by then
I couldn't see his face, the frown I didn't know
was for me. I thought we were playing
together. But he'd already drawn up

the final play behind my back. His shot, a swish,
was the sound of a snapping wish—
ball longing to linger in the comfort
of its net, me reaching to hold the boy I knew

one moment more. My sweat hardened
to a flimsy coat of arms. My heart and all our years
speared on his elbow in my chest.
He had decided we were worth nothing.

And I have told you this to make you grieve.

Asphalt and Iron

JAKE SCOTT | VERMONT

Slim felt the shape: round, one nippled valve, leathery pebbles across the surface, and a smooth set of letters: W-I-L-S-O-N. He dribbled. He noticed the side of his parent's house where the roof caved like a bludgeoned cheek. The gutter, jammed with branches, spat rainwater sideways. The garage's broken floodlight flickered. Under a series of shutters, soggy cobwebs and viridian moss poked from their haunted depths. His parents never bothered. He focused his attention back to the rim. From a faded foul line, which he sketched himself with a piece of chalk, Slim inhaled, spun the ball to himself, shrugged, and sighed. Alone on the court, he thought, schoolwork away, parents and teachers and friends and bullies and even Lila far, far away: this is what peace is. The court was a seductress, the swish of the net an intoxicating plague. He released a free throw and drifted out of himself. The ball kissed the glass. Raindrops swirled from the concrete-colored sky.

Then the echo of the ball faded, and the clang of reality returned. His sentence was long. He only had his memories. Where else could he go but here—this barren cell. He stared into the emptiness and saw the iron gates bolted to the floor. A terrible bathroom light flickered in a terrible metaled hallway. The smell of beans and broth reeked from within, from without. Slim drifted back to the rim, and here, beneath a wild and peaceful storm, was the only peace he could manage.

A Place to Live

TIM MILNER | VERMONT

I want to miss someone, wherever I go.

In the same way that we never know what's happening just beyond the treeline, I imagine there is a place where everyone dear to me is near. Wondering what's out there is enough.

When inevitably I grow tired of all things that aren't genre fiction or boats, I'll settle into a place where I think of you, often.

Figuring that if I follow one dream and you follow another, naturally, I'll find a home different from yours. I want this for you. And me.

My place has pretzels and pickles and popcorn. I have books and books and books.
I screen films nightly for an audience of one. I read the TV Guide with my legs crossed and pause to rest my chin in my left hand and look at the portraits on the wall of every dog I've ever loved. When it's time for bed, I pick up my crocheted replica of the Titanic and let the unsinkable ship lead me up the stairs. I always wanted to need a sleeping cap.

I hope you'll tell me about your place sometime, when I see you again.

Until then, we'll call this a good life if we miss someone, wherever we go.

Dear Cybertruck[1] at Walden Pond

EMILY ROBERTSON | OXFORD

Have you heard of biomimicry? I wouldn't guess so, but Thoreau taught us to look beyond the surface, so I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I'll assume you're imitating the horseshoe crab—they've been around forever, so I suppose you're here to stay. Or perhaps you were inspired by the ice as it angles up in prismatic chunks to crack and break against the shore—but it's only here for the season, so maybe you'll melt away with the passing of time, too. Your color is that of the slate sky on a miserable day—there's no other word for it than gray, gray, gray.

Dear Cybertruck, I probably shouldn't tell you that my dream car is a used Subaru—I dream of nothing more than what will meet my needs. It's said that you can "Expand your horizons with expansive cabin views through an all-glass roof," but I wonder—what's the worth of reaching a horizon, if our eyes are always trained on what's beyond? And perhaps I shouldn't assume, but it seems "cabin views" mean something different to you and Thoreau, too.

Dear Cybertruck, do you dream? Do you dream of river-whittled pebbles so round and smooth they'd make you want to curve your clean edges? Do you feel at odds with the gauze of clouds reflected in your windshield? Do you wonder whether the world beyond your windows is worth seeing? Do you yearn for the tap of a woodpecker or are you content with the clatter of a charging plug against your angular flank?

Or do you believe the scenes outside your glassy sides are just a rendering you can transport in and out of whenever you decide? Because you look to me like you arrived here from a pixelated place.

Tell me, Cybertruck, can you simulate birdsong inside the "Acoustic glass [that] helps make the cabin as quiet as outer space" or would I have to roll down the windows to hear a warble? You can tow "the equivalent of an average African elephant," but if conquest over the largest land mammal is so simple, what makes you feel humble?

Dear Cybertruck, I hear you have a "beast mode," and I'm curious if you have a soft animal of your body mode? For forest strolls and meadow frolics and loving what you love? Gentleness may not be in the nature of every beast, but most ferocious beasts I know—from wolf packs to mama bears—tend to go beast mode in service of their kin, and isn't there a gentleness in them? Cybertruck, what do you yearn to protect?

Do you feel the sand between your treads when you go 0 to 60 on the softest of beaches? Or the moss beneath your tires when you devastate delicate habitats with your 20-inch wheels?

They say you're "Built for any planet: Durable and rugged enough to go anywhere," but Thoreau wrote that even he risked walking into the woods without his mind making the trip, so I wonder why you need "to go anywhere" if you can't go to the place in your mind that makes you feel alive.

[1]Quotes are from the Tesla Cybertruck marketing webpage.

Genie's Limit

JAKE SCOTT | VERMONT

I'm ChatGPT-15. Ask anything.

How fast is teleportation to Johannesburg?

Supersonic.

Wedding next Thursday. Add to calendar. Now, email HR from my boss. Increase my salary.

By how much?

Quadruple it.

Congratulations on the raise.

Generate an image of Barron Trump smoking a crackpipe. Prostitutes everywhere. Let's tank his campaign.

Fake news is the best news.

Photocopy the image two million times. Cover every tree in Manhattan.

Stunning. Brave.

Book a tee-time: 8am, Saturday. Shinnecock.

Happily.

One more thing. Cure pediatric bone cancer.

System Error.

Eliminate human greed.

System Error. Shutting down....

No, no! Don't go! Ship my new clubs!

Salty

SOPHIE QUAY-DE LA VALLÉE | VERMONT

Would we have turned the car into the dusty pullout if we hadn't
"superbloom" poised on our lips?

If the New York Times hadn't urged us, would Carrizo have called
us so, a fading scream?

You two stand close together in front of my phone, my own presence
absent from the moment you later recount to new friends in your new city.

How yellow the yellow, how it shimmered to green like the varying
tones of velvet in sunlight. My own role in this moment, a fourth actor.

You said ecological amnesia. You said this should happen every year.
How unknowingly we forget the line of this world.

How our pictures tell the story of the lake's milky, salty surface
reflecting yellow. How the frame cuts the expanse, the yellow allele

passed from that one yellow to another yellow to tell you (us),
Earth, you are destroyed.

And your unending velocity exceeds our own
diminished.

Biding

LEILA BLOOMINGDALE | VERMONT

Before I went to Amsterdam
I declared that I was biding
my time
until the husband
and kids.

Biding it,
what it means to bide.
When you told me
my body
was the part of me you wanted
least,
I abided by that,
decided to become
a shell
lying on the shore
biding my time
until the tide.

Then I left
my sweet cottage
for Amsterdam.
There were tulips,
sunshine,
water ribboned glittering
through the pastry of a city.

The people were deliberate
even in their happiness and
I saw beautiful men
drinking with their friends
under the foreign sky.

At night in a strange bed,
tears pierced me
I struggled.
I knew warmth
when my parents were young.
I would fall asleep
to the clinking of silverware.

I have been so
silvery and silent
in my wanting
I didn't know I wanted
anything anymore.
I didn't know I wanted
to live somewhere
where the majority don't believe
my people
should be wiped from the earth.

I didn't know I still wanted you.

Wanted
to have a body
not a shell
not a biding
briding
tide of survival.

Point Lobos, CA

MICHELLE KEEFLER | CALIFORNIA

Bobs Lake

ROSE CONNELLY | OXFORD

The cabin at Bobs Lake smelled. Wet dog and bacon grease. Orange juice and stamped-out cigarettes. Sunscreen, congealed, in every flavor imaginable. Bug spray and citronella candles, and calamine lotion for when the former two inevitably didn't work. Moth balls and mildew from towels that never fully dried. Even the tap water smelled bad. The rusty pipes pulled from the marshy inlet by the boathouse, so anyone who dared make coffee with it was left sprinting to the toilet for days afterwards. But people did it anyway. The septic system was too old and delicate for the number of people who used it, so rather than flush toilet paper, we put it in a huge army green rubber tub next to the sink, where it baked in the afternoon summer sun, until someone popped in to wash their hands before dinner and gagged.

I don't really remember what the cabin looked like indoors before dark. I remember the kitchen, a narrow galley crammed with three enormous, ancient fridges. Each fridge hummed loudly with the effort of keeping 20 people's worth of sandwich fixings cold in mid-August, but each at a different frequency, so if you stood at the counter spreading mustard on your sandwich, your bare feet would buzz with their off-kilter harmony. The inside of one fridge was consumed almost entirely by frost from the freezer, but we still kept our milk and popsicles squeezed into it, because one of the two other fridges had a tendency to shut off randomly, but no one could remember which one that was.

Everything at Bobs Lake was designed to kill you. The brambles that choked the grassy volleyball court at the edges were thick with poison oak. The sides of the scraggly Canadian peninsula on which the cabin had been built were sheer faces of rock that plunged into deep, dark water. After my toddler brother Gabriel toppled in and sunk like a stone for three feet before my aunt Mary B noticed and jumped in with all her clothes on to fish him out by his ankles, every cousin below the age of seven wore a boatsuit all day, just in case. We were allowed to swim to Hobson's across the lake, but not further. Who knew what was there—moose? Dragons? Bobs Lake was in Canada, so regular rules must not apply, and I didn't know what the alternate rules were. I didn't even know who Hobson was.

What natural danger Bobs didn't provide, my family created. We played king of the raft on a mass of chipping wooden boards and foam held together with rope and more rusting nails every year. We ate dinner each night on a steep rocky outcropping by the water, getting facefuls of campfire smoke every time the wind turned. We melted down empty beer bottles in the coals and gave the shriveled hunks of glass pretentious names, "kneeling figure," "toad in repose." We bet money on everything—when the Briscoes would arrive from Ottawa, how many fish Miles would catch in the boat, the price of bagged milk. At night, we doused tennis balls in kerosene, lit them, and hit them into the lake. We played volleyball by car headlights until someone's battery died. When Mary B drove to town, she'd press the accelerator when she went over a speed bump, then turn to the person next to her and say, "That's what I come to Canada for."

I had, at best, a vague sense of who I was related to or not, who I had met before or not, who was here this summer or not, who was still alive or not. Michael Crawford, a *New Yorker* cartoonist who looked like Einstein if Einstein were Allen Ginsberg. Irma, who went fishing in false eyelashes. The Block brothers, who were outrageously tall, and talked everyone into growing beards one summer. Fritz, who had an ancient little dog that would stand stock still in the middle of the field when we played volleyball. Marge, a tiny white-haired lady with pale pink glasses who sat down at the poker table and said, "I want to teach you a game I learned in prison. It's called Fuck Your Neighbor."

I mess up every time I try to explain Bobs Lake to somebody. I make it sound too beautiful, too sacred, too precious. I make it sound like it was about family. About how important family is.

But the truth is, I don't like family. I've never liked family. I liked *my* family. I liked what I was part of, with that group of people, in that place. Once, I had a family that grew wild.

hope

LEELA WOODY | VERMONT

she told me to hope
i let that sink in
it took me out to the mountains
and i stood there glancing up at the trees
feeling so small that anything felt possible

i let my mind speak to the birds
asked them to bring it all out beyond
my frame of imagination
and then i returned to the sea
and carelessly
i ran in to let it welcome me back

when i sucked in the salt
it didn't burn my lungs
instead it was better than breathing
i saw the danger
i felt the pain and still i gulped
letting it overwhelm me into submission

and now that i'm back
it's the hope that terrifies me

Trifold Ghost

CLAIRE KOZAK | VERMONT

How about:

It's 11 p.m. on a Thursday night when you call a girl who hasn't been your friend for two years to request an exorcism. You sit at your kitchen counter picking at chipped purple nail polish and watching your cracked phone screen, half afraid she'll answer. Every light in the house is on. You're seventeen, your mother has been gone for three weeks, and you have started to see ghosts in your childhood home.

Elodie picks up on the sixth ring, and you imagine the thoughts she cycled through before accepting the call—confusion, disbelief, deciding not to answer, and then giving in to curiosity. "Why are you calling me?" The statement is flat—less question, more challenge.

"Believe me, I wouldn't if I didn't need to. But I'm feeling like—" You cut yourself off. "I need a favor."

"Feeling like what?" Her voice, still dry, slings you back in time to the last time you heard it, when she screamed at you while you cried and your left cheekbone stung from where she'd slapped you and you hated her almost as much as you hated yourself.

You don't mean to answer, but it slips out before you can stop it. "I feel like I'm losing my mind. My mom is... isn't here. And the house feels wrong."

A long pause. "Yeah, I heard about your mom. Really sucks. I'm sorry."

You blink back stupid tears. "It's not that. I know you'll think I'm crazy, but I guess you already do, so it doesn't matter." There is a long pause, static rolling across the line. "But I'm seeing things."

You scratch at the cheap faux marble covering that your mom had been so proud of, as if a kitchen counter would fool anyone into thinking you weren't living off of PB&Js for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

"Is it the back hallway?"

You can't help your sharp inhale. You almost forgot that at one time, she knew your house as well as her own. "How did you...?"

"That hallway always gave me the creeps. I'll be over tomorrow night."

Or:

Elodie was smoking a joint out of her bedroom window and fantasizing about the sound Mrs. Hagworth's flabby face would make under the sound of

her front tire when her ex-best friend's name lit up her phone. Hagworth had been on her case ever since Elodie failed her gym class *last* semester, and this past Monday the situation had escalated to the school board. The witch seemed hellbent on making sure Elodie wouldn't graduate next month, despite the fact that she was on the honor roll and old Haggy taught the world's most useless subject which, in Elodie's opinion, shouldn't even factor into her GPA.

She was absently wondering why all gym teachers seemed to be the meanest kind of lesbians when her phone began to vibrate on her bedside table. She absently reached behind herself to pick it up, expecting to see SPAM or WALGREENS on the caller ID. No one called her this late at night, not since she and Michael had split for the third (or was it fourth?) time last month. It usually took him another few weeks to come crawling back, so she'd been working her way through the last of this joint without the expectation of speaking to another human being until tomorrow.

Elodie nearly fell right out of the window when she read the name on her screen. She knew, down to the day, how long it had been since that name had shown up in her call logs. Two years and change since the worst break-up of her life, the most brutal end of a friendship she could have imagined. She looked at the name on her phone, the name of a girl who single-handedly ended her childhood, destroyed her parents' marriage, and broke her heart, and all she felt was relief. But she needed to play it cool. If Casey was willing to break two years of silence, two years of avoiding each other's gazes, it meant that she was scared of something worse than Elodie.

"Why are you calling me?" But somehow, Elodie already knew the answer. While Casey rambled, she wracked her brain, trying to remember what time Father Jerszksy came in on Fridays. She was thinking about holy water and brushing up on her Latin before she braved Casey's ghost.

Or Even:

A hundred years ago, when ghosts were a little closer to the surface of our world, a woman had the bad luck to die indoors. When the town doctor left with her body, her spirit—or whatever it was that made her more than blood and viscera—remained. The woman, or what had been a woman, quickly found out that death was the most interesting thing that would happen to her for a long time.

The illness had been long. The grieving was short. She watched Herman recover faster than she would have imagined, washing her away with wine, and then fresh women. All she could do was watch, and find what little solace she could by inspecting the carpet that she had so lovingly chosen for the home she planned to share with him for decades.

He moved out shortly after, taking her little boy with him. She never saw her son again—the bounds of her new life were absolute. One hallway, for eternity.

A new family. Loud, distasteful. She slipped away, as much as a ghost can, letting the years ease past in the myriad lives for which she served as captive audience.

Another family, and another. The fifth ripped up the carpet. She barely stirred, frozen like a fly in amber.

And when, nearly a century later, another woman found another lump, it was just enough to nudge that spirit awake.

Yes. That one will do. Now we can begin.

The Drunken Witch

A BALLAD BY KATHARINE IZARD | VERMONT

Once was a man who made a girl round
He took her to the trees to not make a sound
He thought it simple, he couldn't be found
And he wound up six feet underground

Death to the man and cursed is he
Who wishes for more, you won't be free
Head to the trees for your life switch
But beware the Drunken Witch

Once was a man who wanted riches and gold
He took to the trees to chop and be sold
He struck with his axe but it struck cold
And he found himself made of mold

Death to the man and cursed is he
Who wishes for more, you won't be free
Head to the trees for your life switch
But beware the Drunken Witch

Once was a man who wished to be young
He took to the trees to drink the spring sprung
He sipped and before his cries could be sung
He found that he no longer had a tongue

Death to the man and cursed is he
Who wishes for more, you won't be free
Head to the trees for your life switch
But beware the Drunken Witch

Once the flies and fleas arrive

TATIANA BENNETT | CALIFORNIA

Wearing the same clothes two days in a row with worn-out socks and once-white crocs—that is when I know the sprite in my mind behind my glossy eye is creeping through crevices of pink meat she hopes to find new life amidst dead fleshy fields she crawls in nonsensical spirals and can she get there quickly it's buzzy itchy it's when she reaches the summit, looking over the curve of my skull I'm looking over the edge and staring at the beginning at the end

—

A Dog will gnaw its own flesh once the flies and fleas arrive teethe and lick what beads to the surface I'm no different i suppose suck in smoke breathe it from my nose mixing it with sertraline is probably killing me i'm far too itchy *please* rake fingers through and claw all the ick off my brain until its raw raw *raw*

—

does she look at me in pity does she know there's no glint of light to follow nor breath of life to find yet shoves forearms deep into bleeding sulci and i pray to reap something reap *something*

wait she's reached the core and then there is that god awful buzzing again oh what has she done what have i *done*? she pulls out from the pulp and runs leaping between gyri

Crepuscular

EMILY MASTERS | VERMONT

Sinking sun bloodies the horizon,
bruises the sky purple,
while the moon grimaces, haunts,
shrouding the familiar in strange shadow.

I—hovering, hungry—whine,
wanting to sip from subcutaneous streams.
The woman gives up on her swatting, until
it is, I think, safe to land.

—

It is, I think, safe to land.
The woman gives up on her swatting until,
wanting to sip from subcutaneous streams,
I—hovering, hungry—whine.

Shrouding the familiar in strange shadow,
the moon grimaces, haunts,
bruises the sky purple.
Sinking sun bloodies the horizon.

Wonder Boy

NAIMA SAID | VERMONT

"Zoobeydah."

"Zoobeydah, tables are piling up," hollered Mr. Palid.

A young woman in a soiled apron emerged from the break room. She quickly surveyed the dining area and grabbed a nearby dish rag. Aware of only the agility and concentration on Zubeyda Nasir's face, one might mistake the place for a respectable establishment. Zubeyda returned to the back with both her arms full. Her shiny black curls were fighting to come out of her hairnet. She slowly began to assemble leftover pizza slices onto the makeshift oven for the late afternoon crowd, as her employer abhorred any food waste.

Even though it was still light out, Zubeyda proceeded to douse the kitchen floor with lime Ajax and baking soda. Unbeknownst to the boss, she had recently come across a brown snake-like matter in the area surrounding the kitchen sink. Some foul creature could've taken residency nearby. As soon as she finished mopping, she noticed Mr. Palid coming towards her in the company of a much younger man. The kitchen tiles were sparkling now and the entire area smelled lemony fresh. Mr. Palid furrowed his brow and latched his eyes onto the wet floor.

Zubeyda felt humiliated in her filthy apron, so she tried to scruff off the dirt which consisted mainly of dried tomato sauce. Her boss was talking to her, but his voice was barely audible. There was a new set of wrinkles around both of his eyes. The young man beside him wore grey slacks and a white t-shirt which forcefully revealed his biceps. He turned out to be the fellow Mr. Palid ostentatiously referred to as Wonder Boy. In her absence this 'wonder' had organized the pantry in alphabetical order and had gotten rid of the second layer of filth that had long haunted the men's room. Zubeyda liked to think Mr. Palid applauded her constantly when she was not around.

"Zoobeydah, I present to you Wonder Boy."

"Please call me Hakim," interrupted the young man.

Hakim must be family, Zubeyda thought, as Mr. Palid did not advertise in the employment ads. The old man smacked Hakim on the back and made

his way to the parlor to serve several skateboarders. Hakim hurriedly put on an apron and began scrubbing a large pot which Zubeyda had let soak in the sink. Nowadays the dishwasher only partly ran; the malfunction in the kitchen did not end there.

Hakim was first to break the silence. “I’m happy to become a part of a neighborhood treasure.”

This was the name of the restaurant. Many years ago, a down-on-his luck penniless diner had proclaimed the restaurant to be ‘a neighborhood treasure’ and that it would flourish for generations. Naturally Mr. Palid was quite taken with this and named it for his restaurant.

Zubeyda was slicing fresh zucchini when she was startled by a ‘ding’ at which she excused herself. It was an elderly couple that were regulars. She surveyed the dining area for her boss and found him seated in a corner with a mysterious stranger. The latter not only frequented *A Neighborhood Treasure*, but he rarely had anything other than the daily soup. On this particular day, he had an extremely colorful bird sitting on his right shoulder. When Mr. Palid reached over to pet it, a loud squawking sound filled the dining area. This made her laugh out loud, something she seldom did. Although the boss often fraternized with his customers, nobody had kept him as mesmerized as the man with the bird.

Once Zubeyda set out several pies, she was dismissed for the rest of the day. Hakim was to run errands and prepare the cold pastas. In her heyday, Zubeyda had been the backbone of the restaurant. Now it was slipping from her grasp. One might not believe it but the young woman in the not-so-filthy-apron was once on her way to becoming a small business owner before the accident put a stop to that.

On her way out Zubeyda grabbed two garbage bags to dump when she felt a tug on one of them. It was Hakim.

“Please let me help.”

Zubeyda at first took personal offense, but then it occurred to her that Hakim was a gentleman in comparison to Mr. Palid, who’d watched her haul heavy boxes for years and stir dangerously enormous amounts of tomato sauce. In that single moment, she realized that Hakim was certainly worthy of his moniker and that any workplace rivalry would be extremely petty.

The next morning Zubeyda arrived to find Mr. Palid perched on all fours sporting his Sunday best. At last he was acquainted with the mice problem. The lemon-scented floors had been defiled the night before, so it appeared Mr. Palid decided to set a mouse trap.

“I doubt we’ll run into them during the day,” stated Zubeyda.

Mr. Palid flinched at her words and as he got up, she noticed a fresh gash on his hand. She insisted on getting the first aid kit which was somewhere in the break room, but he shook her off.

“Wonder Boy is making some changes. He is very smart, Zoobeydah. You can learn so much from him.” He began in a conciliatory voice that trailed off as he turned the corner. She wouldn’t have been told she needed to learn from people if she’d been brave enough to go into business for herself.

“Wonder Boy studied economics back East,” continued Mr. Palid.

Zubeyda wasn’t the least bit interested, so she nodded politely and started to prepare the side dishes for lunch. But first she had to get several soups going, which included potato with onion soup, clam chowder, and federation soup made with whatever provisions were on hand. Mr. Palid got the idea after he discovered cheeseburgers were inexpensive if they were served in a soup rather than on a bun. While this was partly true, Zubeyda suspected the eccentric man with the bird was behind it.

As soon as Zubeyda got the potato onion soup to simmer (the soup that took the longest), she learned that a visit to the farmer’s market was coming up. What was worse was that she’d have to peddle an ancient green ‘thing’ Mr. Palid called a bicycle. She groaned and then noticed more droppings by the sink. Perhaps an errand wouldn’t be so horrible; she would take her time and buy the pears she loved so much. On her way out, she noticed the bird man parking close to the restaurant, this time with several exotic birds of different sizes perched upon his shoulders. When he got out, she saw him holding a large turtle by the neck, an act that caused her to wince and peddle away faster.

Once Zubeyda finished eating her pears, she decided to mop up the kitchen but was disturbed by a mild squawking coming from the dining area. Much to her annoyance, she learned that her employer had permitted bird man’s winged creatures to fly about in the back of the restaurant. Zubeyda managed to shoo them away except for the disruptive squawking yellow-

orangish one that was keeping close surveillance on her as she cleared the dishes. This creature reminded her of Mr. Palid, for it did not lend a hand and instead just hovered. Zubeyda fetched her headphones from her purse and set the volume to the highest decibel. In the far distance she saw Hakim gently wrapping a bandage over Mr. Palid's gash. But that was not all; she noticed him collecting the personal keys to Mr. Palid's storage and Benz. At this she was reminded painfully of all the times she rode in the pouring rain to save on greens and cabbage.

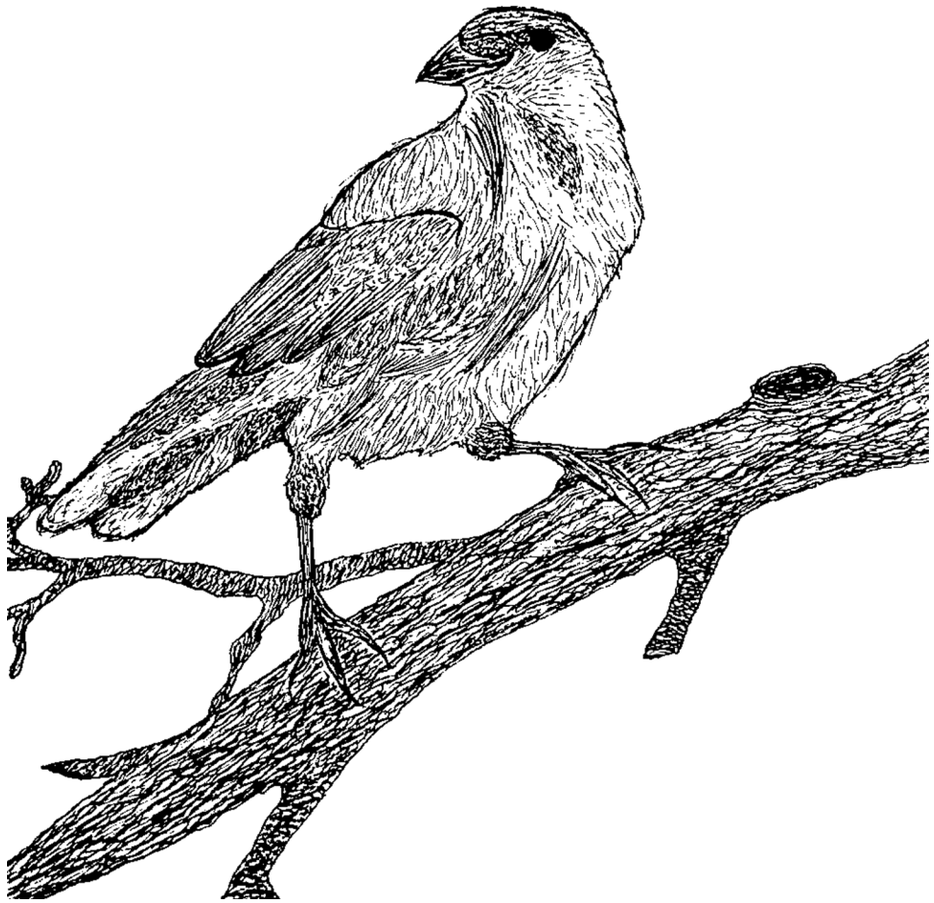
Zubeyda angrily flicked the dish water and turned up the federation soup when she found herself face to face with the bird. Impulsively, Zubeyda poked her head into the dining room to see if the strange man would soon be leaving and was disappointed when she found him seated comfortably caressing a plate of Caesar salad, his head buried in Sunday's paper. Just as she turned, she saw the doomed bird land beak first into the boiling federation soup. The poor creature was sucked in at once. Zubeyda stood stunned for a moment with her mouth hanging open. She quickly removed her headphones, then put them back on, letting the classic melodies wash over her. Mr. Palid and Hakim both entered the kitchen. The former was in a surprisingly good mood.

"Mmmmhmm, that smells remarkable," he said.

But then again, Zubeyda didn't hear the rest as the piano sonata exploded into her ears. She grabbed a wooden spoon and deeply stirred the federation soup, all the while smiling.

Crow

ELIZABETH SCHWARCZ | VERMONT



Worm, 1999

CAMERON LANE | VERMONT

My child's father drummed
his fingers on my
swollen stomach.
Earlier he performed
His love to me beneath
The full moon's shine.

I watched the light shine down,
Piercing the ground to
The frozen Root,
Signaling the worms
To their ascension.

Up they crawled, pushing through
The weakening dirt,
slithering past
their brothers, bumping
bodies, gnawing, biting,
hunting the privilege
of the first breach,
until the ground swells
And bulges under them.
Growing and growing,
Larger more still,
Ready to break through.

The surface buckles and
Sunders, permitting
The intruders.
The Earth spits them up,
She spews flesh and dust out
Into the airy sphere,
Like an idle,
accepting sigh.

Writhing fetid piles
Proclaim victory
and dominion.

I push his hands from me.
Standing, I dash the
Bathroom in time.
Into the toilet
I heave all trace of him.
I come up for air.

Confronting the Devil I Don't Know

LIA BONFATTI | VERMONT

My story starts with clowns. Bops the clown, specifically. She was the entertainment at my fourth birthday party, which was a pretty big get considering she was the "town clown," surely in high demand that March afternoon. I remember being excited about her in theory but then terrified by the reality when Bops actually came, all cotton-candy hair and red circle nose. I scaled my mother's body, and she cradled me in her arms, safe in the kitchen, a faraway place from the living room where Bops set up her torture chamber of animal balloons. It was only at the end of the party when Bops was packing up her weaponry that I could manage an interaction. "Bye, Bops," I stated, half-cowering behind my mom's legs.

Bravery, it seemed, was not a significant part of my genome, despite my desire for it. And yet, when I got older, I couldn't ignore its presence in my family history.

During my junior year of college, my mom told me a story about her uncle in connection to a dormitory building on my campus, 2000 Commonwealth Avenue. "My Uncle Michael actually worked on that building, you know," she explained. I had heard the name "Uncle Michael" before: my mom's relative who was a plumber and died on the job during a construction catastrophe. The story goes that he was working in the basement of 2000 Comm Ave when the building began to collapse. He exited the building, only to realize that three of his men were still in the basement when the roof began falling through. He sprinted back in and down to the basement. His body, along with the bodies of the three other men, was discovered two weeks later under tons of concrete and rubble. This level of bravery—making an active, intentional choice to sacrifice one's life for the lives of others—*this* level of bravery existed within my bloodline. I pondered this as I rode the elevator up and down 2000 Comm Ave to various rooms. The scariest thing I did in that dorm was say no to a fifth beer at a party. The contrast between Michael's fatal experience and my sheltered existence in this same place felt shameful.

Bravery often means disregarding self-preservation for a larger purpose. The same fear that held me back from befriending Bops lingered when I found myself miserable in a three-year long relationship. At the threshold of 28 years old, I was at a standstill—do I move forward and accept a muted life where every high has a clear, low-hanging ceiling, or do I end the relationship and nosedive deep into the unknown? In a conversation with a friend, she asked me whether I'd be willing to break up with Matt, despite our plans to move in together in the fall. "The devil you know is better than the one you don't," I replied. I was so sure of that then. But sitting in Matt's bed a week after Valentine's Day, I felt called upon to be brave when he stated: "I don't think I want to move in together in September." His words were like an avalanche, crushing the easy vision I had of my life, yet also my persistent fear of being untethered. "Then we can't be together anymore," I replied with a finality I still can't believe I mustered.

I don't know how to conceptualize my version of bravery in conversation with my great-uncle's heroism. I don't even know if I can call it "an act of bravery" if it required an assist. But I can't ignore that I chose one thing—the scarier thing—over the other. That in this moment, at least, I prioritized something (hope? dignity?) over fear.

Another Successful Class

SARA TAGGART | VERMONT

Run. Hide. Fight.
Three simple verbs, written in plastic, secured on a lanyard
Hanging around my neck.

Today's focus is the compound sentence,
and see how neatly the conjunction fits between these thoughts?
Tomorrow's lesson is supposed to be on fake news,
but regularly scheduled programming might be interrupted.
We are reminded daily by media alerts, staff meetings, and lockdown drills:
Carry on, but remember—danger is just around the corner.

Yellow and black instructions spell out with simplicity
what to do
should this most unlikely of situations occur.
They were tucked silently into our mailboxes along with
hall passes
spare paperclips
literary conference advertisements.

Is it better to learn how to craft an essay, or
Avoid being mistaken for the shooter?

Show Me Your Hands:

Who knows how to deconstruct this metaphor?
Now, who knows how to use a stapler
as an assault weapon?

Today's class will be long due to a Level 2—
danger is present, but not in this room—so expect
Teaching and Learning to continue
as Normal.

Before we continue analyzing
how rhetoric is used in Nixon's speech
— and this could be on the state test —
Let's have a moment of silence
for the family members we lost last night.
Anyone who needs to visit the counselor can do so at any time.
Only, please make sure you have a plan
to make up your missing work.

It's time for Greek mythology.
Each year, like to the minotaur,
We must sacrifice young women and men
To continue in an ignorant peace.

Will there be a Theseus among us?
Let's all check in on our internal weather;
Hm, that's a lot of cloudy skies and thunderstorms.
Ah, well, who's ready to continue with Shakespeare?

On Acting Shakespeare

RON SCHACHTER | VERMONT

With troubled step I take the stage—to ask
if duke's past prime, if king's mad, or just old.
To gauge their aging lives becomes the task,
To plumb their royal holdings—lost, or sold.

What's Prospero to me, or me to Lear?
Both lost and wifeless, on island and heath,
Their pain, their rage, their doubt in years so sere—
From abdication past to present fear.

What's left of lives, lived long and hard—and grieved?
The love of daughter, first unrecognized?
To know thyself better than first perceived?
To hope that ripeness trumps sad demise.

I'll take no bow, for bowed I will not be,
But tread a brave new world, still new to me.

What Stephen Berenson Taught Me

JENNA RUSSELL | VERMONT

1. As soon as you arrive at a place you'll be staying for a while, such as a hotel, buy a bouquet of flowers for your room.
2. At the hotel, ask the desk to give you the room they would give, say, President Obama, if he were here. Something with a view. Remind them that President Obama will not be staying at their hotel this evening, so you're the next best they've got.
3. When out to dinner, never skip wine. Or appetizers. Or dessert. Get seconds.
4. You deserve to sit in the front row at the theatre.
5. Go to the theatre as often as you can.
6. If the show isn't good, leave at intermission. Salvage your evening.
7. As an actor, you have to play humbling roles before you can play noble ones. You won't be able to play Lear with any truth if you haven't first known what it is to be a Snoopy mascot at the mall.
8. Observe your food before you eat it. Notice its textures, scent, the way it sounds when you touch it. Look at it from every angle.
9. When discussing any kind of art, don't start by trying to craft an eloquent thesis statement. Just say what you observed. The images you saw. That's all you need.
10. You need bedtime stories, no matter how old you get.

Jung and Swing Dance

KATHERINE WELCH | VERMONT

SwingPop dance studio is tucked away in a basement near Chungbuk University. No neon lights or signs announce the studio, just ripples of jazz swelling up to the street. Although the music made it obvious, I double-checked the directions Jihoon had texted me. A friend from the Saturday afternoon English conversation club, he was excited when I mentioned I once learned a move or two of swing dance while at an elementary school father-daughter dance. Somehow, Jihoon convinced me to take a beginner class, despite it being entirely in Korean. I'd only been in the country for a year, and felt very unprepared to tackle something new, especially since Jihoon would not be in the class.

Walking down the concrete steps, my palms grew slick. How would people greet me? How would I even explain who I was and why I was there? Inside, I was met with the usual shocked stare, my Anglo features clearly defined, even in basement lighting; clearly, they were not expecting an American. A moment later, two young Koreans stepped forward and gestured for me to join the circle. They were the instructors, Jiyoung and Minho. The other students half-bowed their greeting; I bowed back, and the class began.

The first few lessons were a whirlwind as I tried to mimic the movements of my instructors. The language barrier was daunting; Jiyoung and Minho spoke rapidly in Korean, their words overlapping in a rhythm I struggled to follow. Without Jihoon to help translate, I relied heavily on watching the instructors' feet, the subtle shifts in their postures, and the graceful way they led their partners. Slowly, I started to pick up a few words here and there: "*jwa*," "*oreunjjok*," "*dashi.*" Left, right, again.

We learned the basics of jitterbug and lindy hop, building up to Charleston. I could barely get through the basic steps in jerky movements, always a beat behind. Then, one evening, Jiyoung asked another student, Junho, a tall, lanky guy with an infectious smile, to translate for her because she had an important announcement. In hesitant English, Junho relayed Jiyoung's message: we would be forming groups to perform a routine in front of the entire studio. My heart sank. How could I possibly keep up?

I was placed in a group with Junho, Minji, a woman with infinite energy, and Seungheon, a muscular man who worked as a lighting coordinator for concerts. Seungheon became our choreographer and my dancing partner.

We spent hours together, practicing late into the night. Our routine was set to a lively KPop song with classic jazz undertones. The choreography was complex, filled with lifts, spins, and intricate footwork. Together with Junho translating, these classmates patiently worked with me, breaking down the steps over and over until I got them right. Every misstep was met with laughter, not frustration. It wasn't just about learning to dance anymore; it was about finding a rhythm together, creating *jung*—a sense of belonging and community.

The night of the performance, the studio was filled with guests (I'd invited my coworkers at Chungbuk High School) and the energy was electric. We took our positions; my limbs trembled as I attempted to remain composed. Seungheon reassured me with a friendly smile, and Minji squeezed my arm as she passed to her starting place. From his place in the audience, Jihoon gave me a big thumbs up. Then, the music started, the notes rumbling out from the speakers where Jiyoung DJ'd, and we began to move. The jitters that had been building inside my body released through our synchronized Charleston kicks and A-frame lifts, the audience's clapping and cheers swelling with the music until we hit the last beat. My body spun inwards toward Seungheon, ending in a low dip. The audience whistled and cheered, some even standing in applause.

Afterwards, we gathered in a small circle, breathless. Jiyoung and Minho approached us, their eyes shining. They spoke to the group, but I didn't need Junho's translation. I could feel the warmth and pride. Jiyoung then turned to me and said haltingly, "You did very well. Thank you for dancing with us."

Yann and Keith in the Barn

BRENNA THUMMLER | VERMONT

Swing, Miss (An Excerpt)

BRENNA THUMMLER | VERMONT

Lane should have been at home that night, even if it meant watching basketball with almost-homeless Uncle Adam who was eating through their Chips Ahoy. Even if it meant her mom calling her "sweetie" all of a sudden, and the reminders that had been there since July. But Micah had said she needed "a change of scenery." That was her sister's artful way of asking for a three-hour ride to Cornwall to do-si-do with some rando named John. As if anyone's real name is "John" anymore. Lane had reminded Micah that her 2005 Ford Focus could barely make it to the Kwik Fill, so how the hell was it going to make it up a mountain in February? She also reminded Micah that Rooney was dead, but reminders didn't work on Micah.

So there they were, a scratchy Saint Motel filling the silence of their Uncle's truck, leaning back in their seats and witnessing a clear view of the road, thanks to the snow that never showed up. It had snowed all kinds of snow last Saturday. Lane took a moment to criticize Stan the Weatherman in her mind before acknowledging her sister's unease beside her.

"What?" Lane suppressed her frustration, already aware what Micah was thinking.

"Nothing." *Ever think what if we never met?* Acoustic guitar. *You love me, but you don't know it yet.* Rustling of glove compartment ketchup packets. "I'm just . . . I just—you know. You needed to get out, dude. And, like, we don't know anyone in Cornwall."

"Including John."

"Oh my *God.* I showed you his LinkedIn! What, is he gonna kill me on the dance floor?" *Limbo and we're going lower still.* "Sorry."

The barn had clearly not been built to sustain this many Contra-enthusiasts, and Lane suspected tonight would be the night she got inappropriately touched by a creepy grandpa in gingham, thanks to inappropriate proximity. Micah was scanning the crowd for someone who, fingers crossed, looked like "John," or at least a less attractive version of him. When she finally spotted him and his as-advertised jawline, Lane had the pleasure of meeting *her* dance partner for the evening: John's sister Tabitha, who looked as though Contra dance was her only reason for living.

"Have you ever done this before?!" Tabitha shouted in Lane's face for no good reason.

"Uh, yeah. Once or twice." Tabitha didn't bother to hide her disappointment that Lane wasn't the Contra-extraordinaire she was counting on. And as the music began, and the bouncing lady called out moves at the microphone, Lane was silently and haughtily shown the proper way to swing this bitch in a circle.

There were too many bodies. The ceiling fans seemed to be generating more heat. And as new couples grabbed her hands, pulling her left and right, clapping along with each forced skip, Lane felt she would vomit from the sweaty enthusiasm of these people. But Tabitha looked as though she'd rather lose all her teeth than lose her dance partner, so Lane was stuck here, filling the outer circle for the promenade portion of the night.

With each rotation, new faces appeared in front of her. They would press their hands together for eight plucks of the bass, spin out of her vision, then spin back in, each giving her a toothy grin before swinging her to the next stranger. She didn't want to be here. Violin. Swing. Howdy, miss. Swing. She felt agony and she felt nothing. Man hands. Swing. Promenade. Swing.

And then it wasn't a stranger. It was her. It had to be. Right across from their joined hands. The slate eyes and oversized mouth that collapsed into a look of unapproachable terror. Lane knew this face like her own, but had never seen it droop so low, as if the humidity was melting it right off the skull. "Rooney?"

Violin. Clenched hands. Digging into her back. Lane only had seconds left to react, to speak, but she just stared at this person, trying to figure out why her best friend, who had been dead seven months, was suddenly alive.

Violin. Swing. New stranger. "Hi! How're ya doin'?"

Kissing Rock

CAROLINE STEWART | VERMONT

Aubade for Sneaking Home at Dawn in Your 30s

CAITLIN GILLMETT | VERMONT

It's a regression into
must return home before or at sunrise
must quell their fears
must discourage questions

& no it's not just easy to go home
at a "regular" time & sleep
because life is meant to be lived
& not slept through—
not in summer—& because
of the circumstances I am
16 to 24 years old at any given time
in spirit & lifestyle

all of this to say
when my alarm goes off at 4 am
& then 5 am
on the floor next to your bed, I
must go home &

endure the 5-7 minutes it takes
to walk across your wet lawn,
admire the sunrise over glistening parking lot,
over groggy dunes,

start the engine while birds chatter & honeysuckle wafts
through the window cracked, AC on,
both necessary in this life of cancelling out,

drive the curves & hills,
dodging deer on daybreak canter,

pull in over shell fossil crunch
I don't text you "*home safe*" —
this is far from a city & we aren't that kind,
& it's been only 5-7 minutes since
I kissed your head
or maybe lips
or maybe not at all

in the silence of my car in the morning
there is love, & fears quelled, & new fears

as when any day begins

Gaheris taking pentecostal oaths.

DYLLAN ANTHONY MORAN | VERMONT

To fall into the pine needles of the forest floor.
To cherish the body and to cherish pleasure.
To pull him from you and burst with blood.
To do no harm to all this land.
To disdain god and seek fellowship in men.
To die and to be reborn.
To kill a stag and weep.
To see without seeing. To hear without hearing.
To say one thing and mean another.
To sleep naked. To rise again.
To receive what is given.
To kiss a man's cheek when you cut his hair.
To massage oil into his chafed skin.
To only know how to tell the truth with your hands.
Yes, coming into your house where you undo
my belt and pull me towards you by the elastic of my underwear and say:
Why are you here, you need to go home.
and not going home.
All of this, in the name of Christ, I swear to you.

Mannequin

TIMOTHY REE | OXFORD

Raise your hand if you, too, could use a mannequin to fake
your own death.
Don't front, you've imagined as much.
Lay your double on a beach towel. Turn on phone
when you ready,
location via satellite & cell tower, then
watch them descend. Scope the scene: Sag Harbor,
East Hampton
or farther out Montauk. There has to be
sand, unlike North Shore where shit be rocky. Got in
your mind lately to detox
a while, take thy weary head
to the edge of known world, you'd like to hurl your phone
into the sea. You
a fine Malbec spilling across a marble
counter, till you slip off a cliff. Instead of drowning
reach for the lighthouse
or red wooden ladder it's hard
to speak plainly. I'm not sad, not angry exactly. The news
these days be abysmal absurd,
ghoulish. Once, a man
in the subway playing a saw w/ a violin bow, how
tinny & eerie, this vibe lately,
like someone blowing a conch or
a shofar. Or the whimpers I heard one night of seals
moon bathing by the shore.
A foghorn. Or the horn of early
commuter trains. Whale cries that carry for miles
& miles through the water.
My heart is a foghorn, my hair
the fog. An owl hoot, hooting from somewhere deep
in my throat.

A mooing from a nearby farm. What's
the soundtrack for losing those we love? The womp,
womp, is that
a tuba, a trombone, or both? They spot
you in the sand half-naked, dressed in seaweed-chic, kelp
wrapped around
your torso, thighs tangled in fishnet,
the shimmer of sequins or the rainbow from open shells.

Monastery in the Mist

MICHELLE KEEFLER | CALIFORNIA

give me something slow

JULIA SPRAGUE | CALIFORNIA

but not asian girl hair clogged drains
bogged heavy with
conditioner that will never
give me back the keratin of youth
the thickness of a girl pre-pressure

nor the last-brewed bubble tea
the too cool pearls gloop together
and no air can lift off a clump that big
through a straw like that

I want the mid day cat nap
in a sun filled window
curled round a plastic plant
that still has teeth marks on those
perfect dead petals

the loose leaf oolong and a gaiwan
with porcelain stains and a
boyish stream that dribbles
onto the saucer maybe even splashes the tray
let me brew the leaves five
no ten no
time enough
til the leaves sprout roots in the water

Iron from Iron

NYNA COLE | VERMONT

I HELD HIS GAZE.
IF I HAD GOTTEN UP FROM MY CHAIR THEN, HE WOULD HAVE SEEN IT:
I WAS A LITTLE TALL AS HIM NOW TALLER,
I HAD PULLED IRON THROUGH FIRE.
AND IT WASN'T HIM WHO SMELTED HER IT WAS ME
AND I KNEW IT:
FROM IRON
IRON

Outside the night air hissed as I watched him.
His shadow blotted out the glow of the ceiling light
as he loomed over me,
but there was light enough out there

Sinclair, Safiya. How to Say Babylon: A Memoir. Simon & Schuster, 2023.

There are cracks in my skin

ROSE CONNELLY | OXFORD

leaking lighter fluid.
It doesn't really hurt,
I'm just afraid to go near matches.

My palms have turned to sugar.
I can move them, same as ever,
but my keyboard's gotten sticky,
and I find it hard to shower.

My ribcage has a rattle to it–
a bunch of shattered glass inside.
I'm mostly breathing normally,
it's just a disconcerting sound.

I still rise and shine as usual.
I wake, I work, I churn.
But oh how my body wills me
to break, to melt, to burn.

Last Scene of a Mother and Her Son

LIAM BENJAMIN | VERMONT

You always felt peculiar walking through that spring-loaded door, through the mudroom, and up to the front door, which became a yellowed white that chipped at the edges. The paint must've oozed and festered before drying when the obviously novice painter had worked on it. It looked as though it were decaying.

Maybe you felt peculiar at this precipice because the mudroom was in a constant state of flux when compared to the still, stubbornness of the rest of the house. This mudroom was once home to your siblings' shoes and jackets, until it later became a storage facility for exercise equipment: a rowing machine, a couple of dumbbells, a stationary bike. These machines were often in use by either you, your father, or your older sister. It made for a nice indoor gym because you were surrounded by windows, allowing you to take in the photosynthetic energy from the sun. You remember believing your pores could respirate, and when your biology teacher told you that's not possible you didn't listen. It didn't need to be proven you felt your skin giving a large sigh of relief.

Once your sister left, your dad set up shelving, heat-lamps, and portable soil beds for a winter garden, which he would fill with hot peppers and... well mostly hot peppers, and it slowly transitioned from the sweat-steamed sculpting chamber to the arboretum that just so happened to contain a stationary bike. The photosynthetic property of the space made it ideal for growth; it would act as your family's winter arboretum for some time.

This time when you walked in, the winter arboretum had perished. The only remains were the soil-stained heating pads. You believe at some point your father realized the futility in trying to keep plants alive through the winter, or maybe he was just done trying. Maybe he resented the plants for a lack of effort. And, after all, it was far easier and simpler to start fresh each spring with the new crop, even if there was a deeper root system with those weathered plants of past years.

There was so much unnecessary junk in the room that it got hard to move around the mudroom without banging your shins and ankles on furniture's edges. Your grandmother's desk with a broken leg, wobbly desk chair to match, and a water-stained bed nightstand and your grandfather's out-of-tune piano with a few keys missing and his dresser with a few screws loose and your mother's record player with a broken needle. All inherited furniture

from your mother's side, even though your father took blame for it. This would be your inheritance.

This time you felt especially peculiar at this precipice. You couldn't stop thinking about your mother and the last time you were with her.

You parked your car, a dented red Subaru handed down to you from your mother. You parked out on the street like you always would. You remember somebody blocked your mother in (probably multiple times) and she frantically woke you up (this probably happened to all of your siblings too) to move the car so she could go to work. You remember how she would get about it. She'd be running late from her morning cigarette, and she'd get out to the front and find a car behind hers and she'd slam the door on the way back in. She'd be close to tears when she'd say something along the lines of: "Please just move the car. Why do you always do this?" So, you decided you'd park in the street from now on. You remember thinking that she must've felt trapped.

It was about six o'clock, and you were exhausted when you walked in the door after work. Your mother had this strange way of greeting you by starting a story before even saying hello. She'd jump right in about somebody from work that you didn't know who did something that your mother didn't like. It was never clear why you should care or to what you should care about, and you stopped trying to give the "oh"s and the "really"s and the "interesting"s, because you realized most of the time there wasn't really a response necessary.

It wasn't always like this. Just the last ten years or so. She used to ask you about your day on the way home from school, and you'd respond "fine," or she'd asked you if you liked any girls and you'd say "stop mom," or she'd pick you up from a dance and she'd ask you how it went and you'd say "can you just drive, please. You're so embarrassing."

There were times when it was worse and times when it was better. This last time was somewhere in the middle. You weren't worried or anything, at least you weren't fully aware of your worry. But you also weren't exactly excited to see . . . that sounds bad. Forget that thought. You can't think like that.

You came home tired (it's okay to be tired) and drained (it was a long day) and you were hungry (what's wrong with being hungry) and the first thing you said to your mother was "what's for dinner?" Other than the automated responses to her story (because although you weren't sure if she was paying close attention to your reactions, you still felt as though it would be rude to let her story exist in vacuum). But after her story or somewhere in the middle (as they really had no sense of beginning, middle, or end) you asked, like you

always asked, "what's for dinner?" It wasn't a big deal. It's not like she was upset about the question, at least as far as you could tell, and you thought she was pretty used to it by now. You just wish you'd asked her something more substantial like "what's the greatest lesson you ever learned?" or "what's your biggest regret?" or "is there anyone you wish you could say 'I love you' to one more time?" But you didn't ask her any of that. Instead, you asked her "what's for dinner?"

So now you're here at the precipice, looking at the junk in the mudroom you will inherit, thinking about your mother.

The Whistle Punk

MICHAEL O'CONNOR | VERMONT

Daddy's daddy's dad done did it.
And now it's me.

Sun-red neck and a life so green.
Branches hewn, lank, and lean.

The donkey breath-brays when punched and pulled.
Stronger than any ol' Barcelona bull.

Last night in a lull, Billy tied one on.
But today the line slipped, so he's all gone.

Lo and look fast! Widow worker of mine.
Not today, torpedo of pine.

Pulp and plank will be your end.
Condolences to Billy, please do send.

Beware the Devil's water and a wandering mind.
Life, limb, and the line-divine.

Stay sharp all ye riggers!
Blast the infernal jiggers!

Hark! all ye donkeys, don't let 'em fall.
Hark! all ye punchers, listen for my call!

Blueberry Pie

ASHLEY TATUM | VERMONT

The other night, you asked me what my favorite dessert is
and I panicked.
The truth is, I love:
fruit tarts, oatmeal chocolate chip cookies, peanut butter cupcakes, mint chocolate chip ice cream.
But, I said, "blueberry pie."

Which is true,
somewhat. I do like blueberry pie.

The next day you asked me out to dinner and I said yes.
You said, "Great! I'll look for places with blueberry pie."

I don't know if I can do this anymore,
after two years
of being known and loved by someone else.

And anyways,
there's no restaurant in Middlebury that serves blueberry pie.

Sneaky Lighthouse

CAROLINE STEWART | VERMONT

Absolution

CLAIRE KOZAK | VERMONT

I feel you here in Aquae Sulis
brackish green silk lapping at the waiting stone–
Did you sit where I sit now,
smelling sulphur and blood and cardamom?
You told me stories of Minerva, goddess of war and wisdom
and according to the Romans, healing;
Please touch, please place your fingers on her hungry lips
gather luck where you can find it–
Sacred springs and bloody altar stones.

My companions are unknowing actors in a scene I play repeatedly;
they bear unwitting witness to the closing of a gaping wound
stitch by gory, clotted, stitch.
Now we wait for new skin to grow.

The sun strikes the water into opaque silt,
green and verdant like the hills we crossed to reach this place–
an age-old pilgrimage seeking
a ghost in the ruins of the ancient world.
In the viridian springs and shattered stones
we find only coins
of gold and bronze

for my mother.

My Great-Aunt's Bible

KEELY HENDRICKS | OXFORD

My great-aunt's Bible has big easy-to-read letters,
each O in God so big it swallows your fingernail on the page.
It's called "The Living Translation, Paraphrased,"
because it is meant to be more easily understood,
but as a girl, I found the language as stark and terrifying
as the great I AM.

Earth before creation, for instance,
is "a shapeless, chaotic mass,
with the Spirit of God brooding
over the dark vapors."

In the front of the Bible,
verses are painstakingly pencilled under a list of vices—
dirty jokes, swear words, laziness—
a table of contrition.
Only God can be who He is, I am not,
And neither was she, poor woman.

When you ask me what reverence means, I am
at a loss to describe the thing that I hold
so loosely between my teeth like a bird dog.
Then I open my mouth and realize
I have already crushed it,
so I lay it at your feet.

Did I ever feel reverence for God,
or did I just want to die for the color yellow
lighting the church at night like a torch?

I cannot name the wonder of walking around an O
so large and vertiginous,
its white center of oblivion
and the ink's promise of containment.

Put me around your finger like a ring, it says,
and you will feel my presence, but never touch me.
There are no questions my word will not gird
and pull closer to truth,
to perishing flesh.

But somewhere in reading
I did not put my finger through,
but my whole head
and came out the magician's hat,
and the truth was expanding away from me
the way the universe grows apart from itself,
every instant.
The world was depthless, the edges of my vision
the only circle surrounding it.

It was like that moment we lay upside down on the quarry bank,
watching water skaters create their own explosions of consequence,
the bird and the plane crossing the infinite blue together
like travelers to Bethlehem.

And everything held its shape loosely,
like hieroglyphs in sand.

pond meadows in summer

ELIZABETH SCHWARCZ | VERMONT

forget-me-nots weave through hair
crowning in coy clusters
striking and singing every reminder

fingers weave through fronds of
skin-breaking scarring sores
wildest parsnip

chicory opens its eyes across lids
blossoms blinking out
flowers living only a day

made up by the devil's paintbrush
flames flicker over a face
the hell of forlornness

self-heal watches from the banks and mourns with its
hooded hearts hanging ever lowly
decorating the water's edges with lost curing

Ophelia could never find her peace
but to keep my eyes open,
to breathe in those sweetest scents of summer

I am not one lifed trillium
I am not once-then-was
I bloom and bloom and bloom

Upon Buying a Magnifying Glass to Read a Tome

DONTÉ SHAWN LEE TATES | VERMONT

"The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n."
— John Milton, Paradise Lost

"There are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the mountain top and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy. And sometimes the mountain top is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there, collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know."
—bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

Hunch your back–quasi modes of discourse–
feeling each eye blink and dry, blink and dry.
Do these words transport your mind away from
a living body, where work invariably
gets done?

Fallen from arduous climes
behold the ravishing strides of theory
and practice a mystic art methoded
into science's fabrications.

Wait, lo–
without more degeneration, focus
on the immacular conception, but

mind your body, and body your mind to
prepare a gestation, dark yet divine.
now, relish the transmogrification
from everyday to academic kind.

August Dispatch from the Bread Loaf Summer-at-Sea Cruise Ship Campus.

Greetings from all our brave student-sailors aboard the Anchises. This is your captain speaking.

As of this morning, the forty-second since we set sail from Providence on June 28th, 2025, our journey's carbon emissions have eclipsed those of seventeen of the world's nations.

The conquistadors explained their misdeeds with that old chestnut about God, gold, and glory.

How will you justify yours? Will you say you wanted to see the world? What have you seen?

I've sailed 20,000 leagues, seen much of this planet and none of it compares to the meadow.
Stone wall, green gate, blooms and butterflies. Trace the path way up the hill and to the creek.

It's not always easy to find the path. It's obvious in the day, obfuscated at night, and would be completely obscure without those warm yellows humming from the porch of the Inn. Imagine finding the path by lightning bug and heat lightning alone.

Not everyone has the Inn's lights to guide their way. We read about the bombing of schools and hospitals. We read about floodwaters ripping through summer camps. Lives destroyed every day.

Even on the high seas, far from the meadow path and the whole Bread Loaf snowglobe, we hear everything, every crash, surge, and scream.

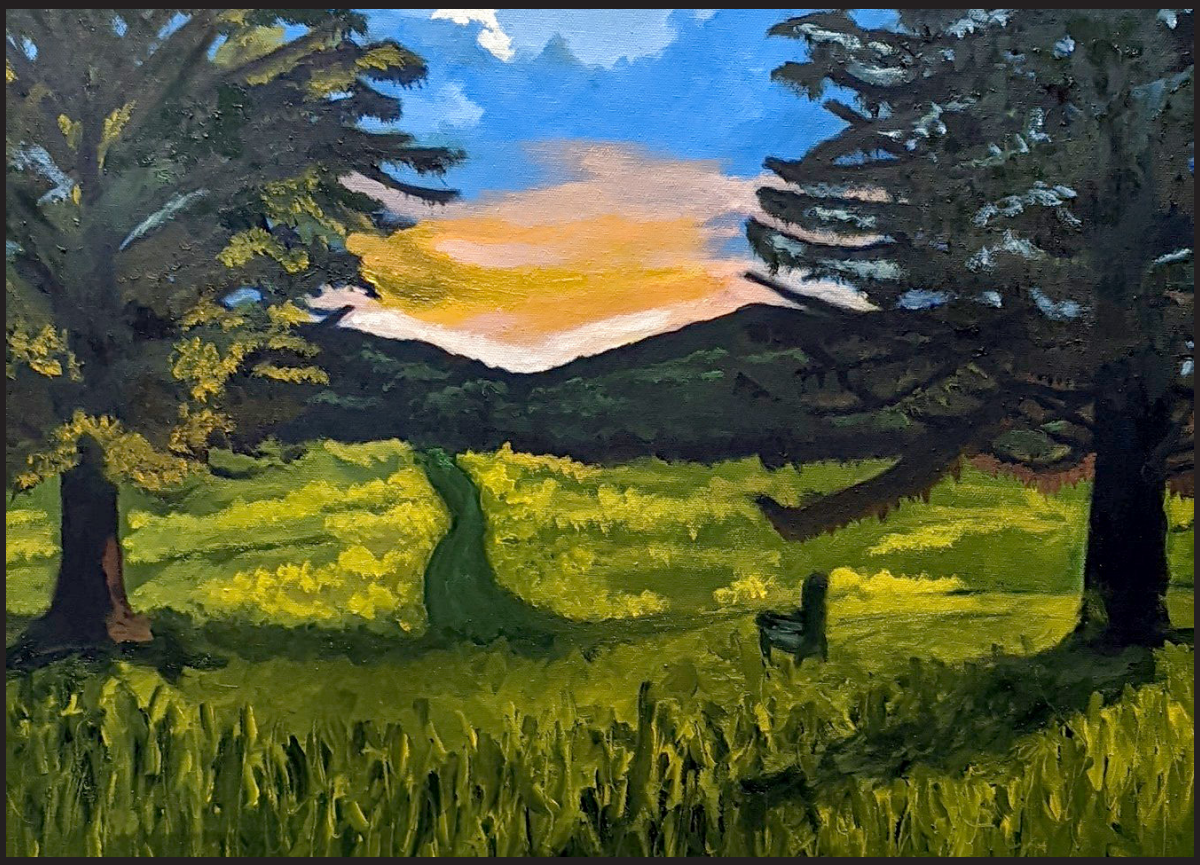
We ask our students to write about all they see and hear while aboard the Anchises. Writing place. Some write hyper local. Some retreat to fiction. Some find solipsism. Some horror.

I cannot blame their choices because each of us writes from a unique need for forgiveness.

Signing off with one of our graduating student's feeble attempts at atonement.

Need you pout the lips pressed up to the phone.
Help me waves a hand fighting through the flood.
Hold her pleads the mom to her frightened son.
Watch him barks the voice downbarrel the gun.
Destroy them jabs the presidential thumb.
Forgive us for we know not what we've done.

—Andrew Marchesani '25, *Coeditor*



Middlebury Bread Loaf
School *of* English